

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-01 ICA-11 /062 W
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R 211706Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9356
INFO ALL EC CAPITALS
AMCONSUL BELFAST
AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY
USOEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: GENERAL ELECTION: POLL RESULTS FOR AUGUST

REF: (A) LONDON 10316 (B) LONDON 12104

SUMMARY: GALLUP AND OTHER POLL RESULTS FROM MID-AUGUST
SHOW A CLEAR IF LESS THAN OVERWHELMING TREND TOWARDS
LABOUR AND A GOOD PERSONAL RATING FOR THE PRIME MINISTER.
WITH THE TIME FOR A DECISION COMING UP FAST, THE LATEST
POLLS SEEM TO FAVOR THE POSSIBILITY OF OCTOBER ELECTIONS.
END SUMMARY

L. TWO POLLING ORGANIZATIONS (WHOSE CONCLUSIONS THE
EMBASSY HAS BEEN TRACKING IN EARLIER REPORTS TO THE
DEPARTMENT) LAST WEEK MADE PUBLIC RESULTS OF AUGUST
POLLS. GALLUP, FOR THE DAILY TELEGRAPH, POLLED A
NATIONWIDE SAMPLE OF 977 BRITONS BETWEEN AUGUST 9 AND
L4. MARKET AND OPINION RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL (MORI),
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UNDER CONTACT TO THE DAILY EXPRESS, TOOK A SIMILAR
SOUNDING ON AUGUST L4.

2. THE MORE IMPORTANT OF GALLUP'S FINDINGS, TABULATED
WITH EARLIER RESULTS, ARE AS FOLLOWS:
"IF THERE WERE A GENERAL ELECTION TOMORROW, WHICH

PARTY WOULD YOU SUPPORT?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE	MAY
CON.	43 L/2	45	45 L/2	43 L/2
LAB.	47 L/2	43	45 L/2	43 L/2
LIB.	6	8 L/2	6	8 L/2
OTHER	3	3 L/2	3	4 L/2

"DO YOU APPROVE OR DISAPPROVE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RECORD TO DATE?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE	MAY
APPROVE	39	40	40	41
DISAPPROVE	42	44	42	40
DON'T KNOW	19	16	18	19

"ARE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH MR. CALLAGHAN AS PRIME MINISTER?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE	MAY
SATISFIED	55	52	50	54
DISSATISFIED	34	39	41	35
DON'T KNOW	11	9	9	11

3. TWO OF MORI'S QUESTIONS WERE THE SAME AS GALLUP'S. THEY ALSO ASKED A GENERAL QUESTION ON PROSPECTS FOR THE ECONOMY.

"HOW WOULD YOU VOTE IF THERE WERE A GENERAL ELECTION TOMORROW?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE
TORY	47	48	46

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LAB	44	42	45
LIB	6	6	6
OTHER	3	4	3
TORY LEAD	3	6	1

"ARE YOU SATISFIED OR DISSATISFIED WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT IS RUNNING THE COUNTRY?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE
SATISFIED	36	34	35
DISSATISFIED	54	56	55
DON'T KNOW	10	10	10

"DO YOU THINK THE GENERAL ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE COUNTRY WILL IMPROVE, STAY ABOUT THE SAME, OR GET WORSE OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS?"

	AUGUST	JULY	JUNE
IMPROVE	32	24	22
STAY SAME	29	33	33
GET WORSE	34	37	39
DON'T KNOW	5	6	6

4. SEVERAL POINTS STAND OUT FROM THE TWO SETS OF QUESTIONS:

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-- GALLUP SHOWS A LABOUR LEAD OF FOUR PERCENT OVER
THE TORIES, OVERCOMING A TWO PERCENT TORY LEAD IN
JULY. MORI, ON THE OTHER HAND, GIVES THE TORIES THE
NOD BY 3 PERCENTAGE POINTS. DESPITE THIS APPARENT
DISCREPANCY, HOWEVER, THE TREND OF BOTH POLLS CLEARLY
RUNS IN FAVOR OF LABOUR. IN BOTH CASES THE TORY BUMP
IN JULY HAS BEEN PARED BACK.

-- THE LIBERAL PARTY CONTINUES STEADY AT A MUCH
REDUCED LEVEL, THE THORPE AFFAIR HAVING REGISTERED
NO APPARENT IMPACT. IF BORNE OUT AT A GENERAL ELECTION,
A SIX PERCENT SHOWING WOULD TRANSLATE THANKS TO PROPOR-
TIONALITY INTO THE LOSS OF AT LEAST TWO THIRDS OF
THE PARTY'S PRESENT SEATS.

-- THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT'S OVERALL APPROVAL RATING
IS HOLDING FAIRLY STEADY. THE MINOR VARIATIONS
OBSERVABLE IN BOTH POLLS ARE NOT STATISTICALLY
SIGNIFICANT.

-- THE PRIME MINISTER'S OWN PERSONAL RATING IS
ON THE RISE.

-- ECONOMIC EXPECTATIONS, A KEY TO THE BIG FLOATING

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VOTE, ARE STILL MIXED, BUT BETTER FOR LABOUR THAN LAST

5. IN ASSESSING THESE RESULTS, WASHINGTON READERS SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT POLLING IN BRITAIN TRADITIONALLY ERRS SLIGHTLY IN FAVOR OF THE GOVERNMENT PARTY. SUMMER HOLIDAY POLLS AND THOSE CONDUCTED DURING PERIODS WHEN PARLIAMENT IS NOT SITTING ALSO TEND TO BE MORE FAVORABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT. ANOTHER FACTOR -- A HARD ONE TO ASSESS -- IS THE INFLUENCE ON RESPONDENTS OF THE PERVASIVE CAMPAIGN ATMOSPHERE WHICH HAS BEEN BUILDING THROUGHOUT THE LAST MONTHS. THE CONVICTION OF MANY BRITONS THAT OCTOBER ELECTIONS ARE A CERTAINTY MAY INDUCE A "TACTICAL" RESPONSE TO POLLERS. OBSERVERS OF THE POLITICAL SCENE HAVE POINTED OUT THAT POLLING RESULTS FROM SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO A GENERAL ELECTION TEND TO BE BETTER PREDICTORS THAN THOSE NEARER THE DATE.

6. COMMENT: IMPORTANCE OF THE POLLS LIES IN HOW THE PRIME MINISTER WILL READ THEM AND WHAT INFLUENCE THEY WILL HAVE ON HIS DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO CALL ELECTIONS. THOUGH BY NO MEANS DECISIVE, THE MOST RECENT RESULTS, WITH THEIR TREND TOWARD LABOUR AND A STRONG PERSONAL SHOWING FOR CALLAGHAN, SHOULD CHIME IN WELL WITH THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF AN OCTOBER VOTE. DECISION TIME IS FAST APPROACHING. IF CALLAGHAN ADDRESSES THE TUC ON SEPTEMBER 5 -- HIS APPEARANCE IS NOT YET SCHEDULED AT THIS WRITING -- IT WILL BE TAKEN HERE AS A SIGNAL THAT HE MEANS INFORMALLY TO KICK OFF THE CAMPAIGN THEN, THOUGH OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT WOULD NOT COME UNTIL THE PRIME MINISTER CONSULTS WITH THE QUEEN AT BALMORAL FOLLOWING THE TUC. OCTOBER 5 LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OR 12 ARE STILL THE DATES MOST TALKED ABOUT.

7. MEANWHILE, CONSERVATIVE PARTY OFFICIALS IN COMMENTING TO THE EMBASSY ON THE RECENT POLLING RESULTS TAKE WHAT COMFORT THEY CAN IN THE THOUGHT THAT AN UNDERDOG IMAGE WILL BE A USEFUL STIMULUS TO PARTY ACTIVISTS AND COULD HELP RALLY TORY VOTERS. THEY POINT TO 1970, WHEN A LABOUR LEAD IN THE POLLS IS BELIEVED TO HAVE FED COMPLACENCY AND CONTRIBUTED TO HEATH'S SUCCESS. END COMMENT
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